

LEISURE SERVICES AND SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (LSSE)

Fiscal Year 2005

Community Service Awards and Volunteers

A total of **633 volunteers** were utilized in FY 05, logging in thousands of hours and assisting in nearly every facet of the Amherst Leisure Services and Supplemental Education Department's (LSSE) programs. Volunteers from all walks of life gave LSSE a helping hand – parents, high school students, students from the five colleges, senior citizens, members of the business community and civic organizations. And the diversity did not stop there. Community members assisted as coaches, ski and trip chaperones, special event staff and support for those with special needs, after-school assistants and aquatics aides, community theater volunteers and more.

It is a challenge for the LSSE staff to direct the efforts of such a vast group. The rewards for this undertaking are great, however since, we long ago learned that connecting community members to programs can create a more meaningful relationship for all. Cost recovery for LSSE programs certainly would not be attainable without the work of so many dedicated volunteers.

This year LSSE again found reason to honor some of the many volunteers that enhance LSSE's recreational, educational and artistic offerings.

The Arts and Supplemental Education Award was presented to Rosemary Caine, Steve Morgan and Chris Riddle. The award is given to an individual or group of individuals whose contribution to the community in the area of the arts and supplemental education is outstanding. Caine was honored for her selfless contribution of time and expertise as a board member for numerous theater groups, and as an actress, playwright, and musician. She was the primary force behind LSSE's Community Theater trip to Ireland. Morgan's dedication to the arts is legendary. His generous contribution of professional theater skills to Hampshire Shakespeare, Valley Light Opera, and Amherst Leisure Services Community Theater has made the difference between success and failure for many productions, including the Town's Community Theater performances in Ireland. Riddle cut his teeth on set design with Valley Light Opera about five years ago, and never looked back. Chris' brilliant artistry and dedication to perfection have given our Amherst Leisure Services Community Theater's last three plays the look of professional productions.

Tom Douherty was recognized as the Youth Basketball Coach of the Year. He was honored with this award for his ten-plus years of commitment to youth basketball, often coaching two teams at once during a single season.

Robert Krumery, head pastor for Mercy House, was honored with the Quality of Life Award. He received this well deserved distinction at the Amherst July 4th Celebration. Often behind the scenes, Krumery has supported LSSE and the larger community for many years by offering volunteer support to special events and by identifying others to help as well. Mercy House volunteers can be found at Chamber of Commerce events, at community events on the Town Common and anywhere additional assistance is needed, helping to ensure success.

Distinctions, Highlights, and Awards

The Amherst Leisure Services Community Theater Founder's Scholarship was awarded to two Amherst Regional High School recipients this year: Kendra Lyons and Lan Mai Morgan.

The Donohue Institute sought out LSSE Director Linda Chalfant this year to provide a presentation to a group of visiting Indonesian citizens who were in Amherst to learn more about the United States' approach to education. Chalfant enlisted the support of our partner within the Amherst Community Arts Center, Director Jana Silva, and together they presented a comprehensive look at adult and youth educational opportunities.

Barbara Bilz, Director of Development and Community Programs, and Stacey Lecuivre, Program Coordinator, met with a delegation from the country of Belarus. The Belarusian delegation consisted of a group of professionals who provide state-sponsored recreational opportunities to youth in various regions of Belarus. Bilz and Lecuivre made a presentation to the group about recreational opportunities for youth in Amherst and exchanged ideas related to the challenges both countries face as they strive to provide quality recreational programming and services to youth.

Steve Stoia, LSSE's Arts and Supplement Education Program Director, was honored with the 20th Annual Friends of Education Award by the Amherst-Pelham Education Association. Stoia has captured the spirit of collaboration and educational and artistic excellence in so much of what he has achieved over his many years of successful work at LSSE, including a successful partnership with the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Department.

The Rainbow Players achieved the unimaginable this past May by raising enough funds to support a trip for the theater group to travel and perform in Ireland for a second year in a row. Eight fundraisers were held and included performances that ranged in variety from Valentine's Day Singing Telegrams to a presentation before the Department of Mental Retardation's Legislative Breakfast.

Jane Smithwick Shohan, Rosemary Caine, Brid McBride, Ethan Covelli, and Dan Moylan were featured as "Spotlights" in the LSSE publication, *Amherst Leisure Times*. Smithwick Shohan has taught acrylic painting for LSSE for thirteen years. Over the years, she has helped to engage hundreds of people in the art of painting. Caine and McBride played pivotal roles in helping the Rainbow Players achieve their goal of performing in Ireland. Caine helped with logistics for the trip and McBride, who resides in Ireland, played a key role in showcasing the group at various venues in Ireland. Covelli was an integral part of the LSSE's sports program. He served as a referee, coach, site supervisor, and worked in numerous other capacities at LSSE for the past five years. Finally, Moylan has worked at LSSE's camps and after-school programs for over five years. He helped both these programs grow over that period of time.

Administration and Facilities

Another banner year was seen in the area of brochure advertising with LSSE Registrar Donna Roy and her talented and deserving group of University of Massachusetts graphics and advertising interns. Brochure advertising grew from \$14,090 in FY 04 to \$19,470 in FY 05. Looking back to FY 03 one can see that the revenue (\$8,274) has more than doubled since that year.

The LSSE website also saw pleasing modifications, thanks to the help of several University interns and the watchful guidance of Operations Manager Laurel Kushi and LSSE Registrar Pat Desmarais. Improvements brought friendlier user applications with drop-down menus, a monthly calendar, superior navigation qualities and a "center stage" to visually highlight LSSE's

many offerings. Web registrations grew from 933 in FY 04 to 1,216 in FY 05. Again, this trend shows almost a doubling from the 696 Web registrations in FY 03.

Registrations at a reduced fee increased from 748 in FY 04 to 816 in FY 05. Real collaboration and cooperation between LSSE and the Amherst Regional Schools outreach staff facilitated this growth. With feedback from the outreach staff and support from the Amherst School Superintendent, LSSE created streamlined procedures to help bring fee waivers to those most in need. The still sizeable number of registrations requiring special needs assistance decreased from 220 in FY 04 to 187 in FY 05.

Capital Improvement Projects

Capital improvements for FY 05 continued to revolve around two projects: the Plum Brook athletic fields and the Amherst skate park study. Financial concerns about the Plum Brook project arose when the Department learned that the state Environmental Bond Bill had not materialized. This funding (\$90,000) was believed to be solid in 2002 when the initial project budget was established. Additionally, three years of delay and challenges to the project increased the initial cost estimate. To counter this shortfall, the LSSE Commission asked the Community Preservation Committee, CPAC, to consider an additional request for funds, and following their review CPAC unanimously agreed to support this request. The project was bid in the spring of 2005, just prior to the start of the Annual Town Meeting, and a qualified low bid was received.

At this juncture the project had unanimous support from the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, the Finance Committee, the Joint Capital Planning Committee, the Community Preservation Committee and the LSSE Commission. The Select Board voted four to one to oppose the project.

Since approval was needed from Town Meeting to appropriate the additional CPAC recommendation and to approve the remaining balance from a state grant, the project was included as an article for the Annual Town Meeting. An additional petition article calling for a Special Town Meeting to rescind the previously approved borrowing authorization for \$500,000 was brought forward by local citizens opposed to the project.

Following many days of lengthy discussion in June of 2005, Town Meeting voted three times on this project. Although two out of three of the votes were close, all votes supported the project. The plan had been to begin construction at the conclusion of Town Meeting; however, the group opposed to the project gathered signatures for a referendum. The referendum ballot question seeks to rescind the previously approved borrowing authorization.

Minimal progress was made on other capital projects; however, with support from the Department of Public Works, the Groff Park restroom project was initially reviewed by the Design Review Board. Additionally, several citizens met with the LSSE Commission to request that the Town transfer station be moved from its current location at the new landfill to an area at the closed old landfill. The LSSE Commission unanimously voted to oppose this proposal, as the old landfill has been mentioned as an area for future park development since the early 1980's and was designated as such in the initial closure and capping procedures.

A number of skate park user group meetings were hosted by the Commission in FY 05 and the skate park study was also completed by the Berkshire Design Group. The study lies in wait for further review and action by the LSSE Commission and Department.

Grants, Sponsorships and Gifts

FUNDRAISING

Program	FY 05
• Fourth of July	\$ 8,850
• Taste of Amherst	\$ 1,600
• Camp Sponsorship	\$ 3,000
• Golf Tournament (FAR)	\$ 2,000
• Halloween Parade and Activities	\$ 235
• Community Theater	\$10,000
• Grants for Community Theater	\$ 2,000
• Rainbow Players Trip to Ireland	\$ 7,855
• General Unsolicited Donations	\$ 200
• ACAC/Outdoor Challenge (FAR)	\$ 480
• Amherst Com. Aquatic Center	\$ 2,440

Banner Sponsors and Other Donations

This year several new fundraising events and campaigns were launched. Friends of Amherst Recreation (FAR) sponsored the first-ever Night Golf Tournament in Amherst to benefit the Outdoor Challenge Camp. Forty-six players took part in the tournament at Cherry Hill Golf Course. In addition, FAR initiated a fundraiser for the indoor pool and the Outdoor Challenge Camp by distributing solicitation letters as inserts in the Amherst Leisure Times. This approach met with limited success. However, numerous business sponsors contributed to a new “banner campaign” to support the Amherst Community Aquatics Center. In return, their logos were displayed on banners at the indoor pool.

Youth and Adult Sports

The youth and adult sports programs saw modest changes in FY 05. Summer sports camps that were offered in FY 05 included a total of 32 camps, with 784 participants involved in 10 different sports. The summer camp programs were held over a period of 6 weeks. The Youth Basketball league reached a total of 592 players. There were a total of 58 teams with 33 participants in the Girls’ suburban league and 48 participants in the Boys’ suburban league for the 2004-2005 season. The FY 05 Adult Softball League had a total of 33 teams participating. Girls’ Softball had 150 players in FY 05. The Summer Ultimate League had a total of 601 participants in FY 05. The Adult Volleyball program continued with two seasons and three divisions and included a total of 14 teams for the fall and spring programs. The popular youth and downhill ski programs drew 183 participants in FY 05.

Other programs that added to the mix of diverse LSSE sports offerings included: adult sandlot baseball (44 participants); Girls’ Lacrosse (22 participants); Suburban Football (78 participants); Fit Over 40 (27 participants); and Jump Rope (30 participants).

Aquatics

The following participation levels were noted in the FY 05 seasons for the indoor and outdoor aquatics programs.

AQUATICS PROGRAM

<u>Program</u>	<u>FY 05</u>
School-year Youth and Adult Lessons	702 (41% increase over FY 04)
Summer Youth and Adult Lessons	653 (15% increase over FY 04)
Pool Memberships Sold During Summer	504

During the school year, 145 households purchased membership passes for 376 individuals.

The focus for the aquatics program this year was to provide more youth swimming lessons to the community during the school year. Lessons were added to the Saturday schedule and additional sessions were added to the calendar at various times during the school year. School-year swim programs and memberships showed significant gains from the previous year.

Friends of Amherst Recreation continued its fundraising efforts to help subsidize the costs of keeping the Middle School pool open and supply adequate staffing in FY 05.

After -School and Vacation Youth Programs

The following participation levels were noted in the FY 05 season for the after-school and day camp programs. These numbers were relatively unchanged from the previous year, after significant growth in FY 03.

DAY CAMPS

	<u>FY 05</u>
Adventure Playground	516
Early Adventures	265
Outdoor Challenge	<u>175</u>
	956

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Average Daily Attendance	68
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Supplemental Education Program, Performing Arts and Special Events

In FY 05, 1,319 adults and children participated in 159 classes (283 were offered). This is 41 fewer classes offered than the previous fiscal year, when 1622 students participated in 200 classes. The reduced number of offerings can be partially attributed to the ending of strategic partnerships with The Red Barn Music Studio, North Star, and Fiber Arts. The cancellation rate went down to 43%, from 44% last year.

Collaborations and strategic partnerships with other organizations have helped to improve the quality of our youth and adult classes. In FY 05, we expanded our relationship with the Amherst Community Art Center in order to provide more class offerings, and LSSE now has a much more cooperative relationship with the Amherst Regional School District's administration. This has

resulted in smoother operations and the ability to utilize new spaces for our classes, such as Amherst Regional High School's computer lab.

Amherst Leisure Services Community Theater saw the highest sponsorship for a play since its 1993 beginnings: \$12,000 was raised from sponsors, including three grants. *Cinderella* was the Community Theater's production this year, and it was very well attended, considering that performances were plagued by bad weather, including blizzard-like conditions during the second and usually most profitable weekend.

Valley Light Opera (VLO) has been very appreciative of LSSE's administrative support for their annual productions over the years. This long-term collaboration may eventually result in the birth of a new set shop constructed on VLO land that can also be utilized by LSSE's Community Theater.

The Community Band's performance at Hot Summer Nights in FY 05 was very well received, as was their annual performance at the 4th of July celebration. The Police Department estimated that over 20,000 people watched the fireworks display in FY 05.

Kids Korner, sponsored by LSSE at The Taste of Amherst, earned considerable good will with the Amherst restaurant/business community and parents with small children who attended this event. Numerous activities were available for children, including carnival games, pony rides and live performances by local talent. In addition, LSSE sought to showcase numerous area business and nonprofit organizations that were invited to join LSSE in this venture.

Special Needs

Open Arms membership rose to 97 in FY 05. Open Arms cabarets were produced once a month for 9 months, with an average of 12 participants at each performance. Participation in Rainbow Players rose to 30 individuals this year. The highlight of the year for Rainbow Players was their encore trip to Ireland this year. Five Rainbow Players members made the trip to Ireland, accompanied by four staff members and volunteers.

Special needs participants were effectively integrated into all facets of LSSE programming. Approximately 6-8 children each session were an integral part of day camps, after school program, sports and vacation camps. A large proportion of the children required one-on-one assistance. This effort was coordinated by the Special Needs Director, Ezzell Floranina and Program Coordinator Stacey Lecuivre.

Summary

FY 05 saw new and expanded programming opportunities for its participants. In addition, there was a mixture of achievements, successes, collaborations, challenges and concerns. Requests for LSSE programs and services have continued to grow at a steady rate since its beginnings in 1982. The guidance and oversight by the LSSE Commission has helped to ensure that growth and changes to policy are made with the proper level of community input.

Slow progress has been made in moving forward the Plumbrook athletic fields improvement project. However, LSSE is still optimistic that this project can be started in the fall of FY 06. The Amherst skate park study was very successful. There was excellent input from potential participants and several designs and locations are now under consideration.

Programs at the Amherst Community Aquatics Center saw tremendous growth this fiscal year. But there has been considerably more pressure to obtain private donations in order to cover the rising costs of utilizing this Amherst Regional Middle School facility. On the other hand, fundraising expectations are not limited to the support of the Amherst Community Aquatics Center. There continues to be greater emphasis on obtaining private dollars to support many of the Department's programs and functions. LSSE solicits donations for its work, including, but not limited to the Outdoor Challenge Camp for teens, special needs programs, 4th of July Celebration, Community Theater, and program fee subsidies for low-income families. Considering the increased competition for donations in our small community, LSSE has done a remarkable job of fundraising. In fact, there is no other recreation department in the region that can match Amherst Leisure Services' fundraising efforts on an annual basis. The Department is proud of this achievement but recognizes that competition for private donations among organizations and individuals in the area has intensified. Therefore, it is imperative that there be also adequate tax support for LSSE so that we can continue to provide the programs and services that Amherst residents expect and deserve.

Linda Chalfant, Director